



The Story of the **RED CROSS**

Krishna Satyanand



Nehru Bal Pustakalaya

The Story of the Red Cross

Krishna Satyanand

Illustrator

Siddhartha Banerjee



National Book Trust, India

ISBN 81-237-0875-0

First Edition 1975

Sixth Reprint 2002 (*Saka* 1923)

© Krishna Satyanand, 1975

Published by the Director, National Book Trust, India

Henri Dunant's Early Life

In 1831 in the beautiful city of Geneva in Switzerland, a little round-faced boy of three, with pink cheeks and a mop of silky hair, sat playing quietly in the sitting-room of his house.

The room in which he was playing was richly furnished, for his father was a successful businessman and an important citizen of the town. His mother was known for her gentleness and good deeds. It was she who was largely responsible for Henri's early education.

It was a bitterly cold day. People moved about in the streets muffled from head to foot—only the tips of their noses glowed a rosy pink.

Sometimes Jean Henri Dunant, for that was the little boy's name, talked to his toys, sometimes to himself. He was completely absorbed when his mother walked in, dressed in outdoor clothes, carrying a basket. Forgetting his toys,

Henri ran to her and clutched her skirts.

"Where are you going, Mama?" he asked.

"To the orphanage, Henri," she replied.

"Orphanage?"

"Yes," she replied, "the orphanage in the city."

"I'm coming too," Henri said, excited at the prospect of an outing.

"No, Henri," his mother said gently. "It's a cold day. You stay here and play. I'll just be back to tell you stories."

She let herself out quietly. Henri sobbed awhile then stood uncertainly by the door, the tears still glistening in his eyes. Finally he went to the window and looked out. His mother had just got into the carriage. A command from the coachman, and the horses moved off.

Henri felt forlorn. He continued to stand at the window, alternately peering out and drawing figures on the frosted window-panes. After a while he grew tired of this and returned to his toys. He found a basket and picking it up marched round the room pretending he was going to the orphanage.

When Henri was a little older, he asked his mother, "What is an orphanage, Mama?"

"It is a home for children who have no father or mother," she replied sadly.

The boy's eyes grew wide with disbelief. "Are there any such children?" he asked.

"Yes," replied his mother gravely. "Some children's parents die when they are still very young. The good Lord takes them away and there's no one to look after their

little ones. These children are kept in a home and kind people look after them. They give them food and clothes and beds to sleep on, and take care of them when they are sick."

In Henri's home there was a great deal of talk about orphanages and how to improve conditions in prisons and hospitals. And as he grew older Henri realised that the wealthy people of Geneva took their duties as citizens very seriously. They were always trying to find ways to help those less fortunate than themselves and willingly gave money to those in need.

Henri's parents, too, took their responsibilities seriously. His father was a banker but he helped to find homes for orphaned children. His mother often visited the houses of the poor, sick and aged, carrying baskets of food and clothes. As Henri grew up he accompanied his mother on these visits. He heard her comfort the sick and saw how she often left behind a basket or a few coins unnoticed on a table.

These memories remained with Henri and he grew up with the feeling that working for the poor and helpless was his first duty as a responsible Swiss citizen.

Once when he was about eight years old, Henri accompanied his parents on a trip to Toulon, a seaside town in France. Convicts from Geneva were sent here to help load and unload ships.

Henri's father was responsible for the welfare of the convicts. The sight of the prisoners moving bales of goods with chains fastened to their legs filled Henri with horror. How inhuman and cruel people were! That night he could

not sleep. He kept hearing the clanking of chains as he tossed restlessly in bed. He took a vow that when he grew up he would do his best to help the convicts.

Henri was an avid reader. He read about Florence Nightingale who worked hard to improve nursing conditions for British soldiers in the Crimean War and of how Elizabeth Fry had worked for prison reform in Europe. He also read the much talked about book *Uncle Tom's Cabin* written by an American writer, Harriet Beecher Stowe. This book played an important part in bringing about the abolition of slavery in the United States. The work of these three women inspired him greatly.

As a young man, Dunant spent a lot of time on charitable work. He was a member of the League of Alms, an organisation which helped the sick and poor. He visited the city prison regularly with gifts of food and clothing. He spoke to the prisoners and tried to convince them that they should not break the law.

Apart from these interests Dunant was occupied with his business career. In 1849 he joined a bank in Geneva to learn banking. He picked up the work so quickly that four years later he was appointed General Manager of one of his firm's branches in Algeria. He left the company later and set up his own business.

Dunant was hard working and intelligent and seemed all set for a successful business career. His family and friends predicted confidently that he would soon become very rich. Believing in him, many of his father's friends put their money into his business.

The Battle of Solferino

Dunant had to travel extensively in connection with his work. One such trip took him to the Lombardy plains in Italy in June 1859. He had gone there on a combined business and pleasure tour. The Emperor of France, Napoleon III, helped by the King of Sardinia, was at war with Austria. Dunant hoped to meet Napoleon and get permission for a business project.

It was a beautiful spring night. Dunant was fast asleep in an inn in Castiglione de la Pieve, a town in northern Italy.

Suddenly around 3 a.m. he was awakened by the sound of artillery fire. The sound came from nearby Solferino, a small village with less than a thousand inhabitants.

The firing grew louder. The Battle of Solferino had begun. Dunant realised that now there was no hope of an audience with the French Emperor.



He leapt out of bed, pulled on his clothes and hurried outside the city towards Solferino. He wanted to reach a particular hill from where he would be able to see the fighting clearly, but the bridge on the way had been blown up. He hesitated a moment, then he waded across the stream. On the other side he found an old wagon which took him to the hill.

Once on top of the hill, he got a clear view of the battle-field. Below him, on the plains over a ten-mile stretch, 300,000 men faced one another. On one side were the French and Sardinian soldiers in their colourful uniforms and on the other, the Austrians. Dunant stood there for hours utterly absorbed.

Dawn broke. Lances gleamed as they caught the rays of the sun, drums rolled, trumpets sounded, muskets cracked.

The scene was alive with movement. Galloping horses and tramping feet raised clouds of dust. The smoke of bursting shells soon created a thick screen. But as the sun rose in the sky, Dunant caught an occasional glimpse of the drama below.

The opposing armies rushed at each other like wild beasts. Grenades and bombs were flying fast. Those who managed to escape these were either killed by bayonets or bullets or trampled under the horses and gun carriages. One man, however, moved about fearlessly in the battle-field, comforting the wounded. He was the Abbé Laine, Napoleon III's chaplain. Some women too gave the wounded water as they cried piteously in their thirst.

From where Dunant stood he could see black flags flying



in the distance. They marked the sites of field hospitals where the wounded were taken for first aid. Though it was agreed that no one should fire towards these hospitals, shells often hit them. Even ambulances and doctors were not spared.

The fighting continued for fifteen hours. Then the sky became overcast. Thunder roared above the sound of cannon, above the cries of the wounded and dying. Lightning rent the sky. One of the worst storms in memory raged and put an end to the fighting. The Austrians withdrew. The Battle of Solferino ended.

When darkness descended, many officers and soldiers began searching for their missing comrades among the dead and wounded. They carried lights to help them in the search. When they recognised someone, they knelt down and said a prayer or shed a tear. Injured friends were taken to hospital.

By nightfall the hills around Castiglione were alight with little fires. Soldiers cooked their soup and coffee. Then they lay down their weary limbs, closed their eyes and fell into a deep sleep.

The Man in White

The sun rose the next morning to reveal a horrifying sight. The corpses of men and horses covered the battle-field. Fields were devastated, orchards laid waste. Fences were broken, farm walls riddled with huge holes. Helmets, belts, tins, knapsacks, guns and cartridge boxes littered the battle-ground and the road to Solferino.

The losses in the battle had been enormous. Over fifty thousand men including more than a thousand officers had been killed in only fifteen hours of fighting. Thousands lay wounded, mutilated and in the throes of death.

The Quarter Master of the army and his assistant put the wounded on stretchers or chairs saddled to mules and took them to the field hospitals from where they were transferred to the nearest town.

By noon the little town of Castiglione was jammed with almost six thousand badly wounded soldiers. Every church.



convent, house, public-square, courtyard, street, or pathway had been converted into a temporary hospital.

And still the convoys carrying the wounded continued to pour in. The local authorities were unable to cope with the situation. There were no more beds for the wounded. Though the people gave generously, and water, food and lint were available, there were not enough people to distribute them, nor to help dress wounds. Most of the army doctors were in Cavriana, a nearby town. There were also very few medical orderlies. Confusion reigned and the injured cried out in pain.





At first, Dunant watched this scene helplessly. But soon he was overcome with shock and anger. Something had to be done. The wounded couldn't be left to die like this, he said to himself. A volunteer service had to be organised immediately.

Dunant knew that the neighbouring hospitals were full and that he could expect no help from them. So he got together as many civilian doctors and volunteers as he could and, taking them to the church at Castiglione, set to work.

Water was brought from fountains and farms to relieve the thirsty. Floors were swept and washed. Little boys went from door to door begging for soup. Women brought soap, linen and sponges. Dunant sent his coachman to bring in supplies of tobacco, lemons and oranges from the neighbouring town of Brescia. Wounds were washed and dressed. Pipes were filled and glasses of refreshing lemonade passed around.

Hour after hour Dunant worked, his white summer suit splattered with blood, screams of pain ringing in his ears. But soon, all the wounded were put on straw pallets which were arranged in rows so that even by candle-light the doctors could move about easily. Dunant walked between the rows offering sips of water and words of sympathy. He filled pipes and cleaned and bandaged wounds. The soldiers named him 'The Gentleman in White'.

Meanwhile more volunteers arrived. An ex-naval officer and a couple of English tourists who had entered the church out of curiosity were persuaded to stay and help.

A Swiss merchant came for two days and spent his time writing letters for the dying men to their families.

Most of the women volunteers were totally untrained. But their gentleness and care gave courage to those in pain. They, however, only tended the French and Sardinian soldiers whom they regarded as friends. The wounded Austrian soldiers were left to suffer. Dunant, who saw the human being in everyone, attended on all.

"But he is an enemy," exclaimed one peasant woman as he bent to comfort an Austrian soldier. Dunant straightened himself, put his hand on her shoulder and looking into her eyes said quietly, "The enemy is a man."







The way in which Dunant said these words impressed the woman and the other volunteers. They began to follow Dunant's example. Water was offered to the Austrians and cold compresses applied to their foreheads. "Tutti Fratelli! Tutti Fratelli!" shouted a woman. "They are all brothers!" Everyone took up the cry and the message echoed and re-echoed through the church.

But after a while, the zeal of the volunteers began to wane. One by one they began to leave. The misery of the patients was beginning to depress them. Besides, they were needed at home and some of the soldiers had a long recovery ahead.

As the days went by, many soldiers died, others were moved to bigger towns and hospitals. Dunant appealed for the release of captured enemy doctors, pleading that they be considered neutral. Napoleon agreed and the Austrians got back their doctors. Though fresh cartloads of wounded continued to arrive, order was gradually restored and the city's services began once again to function effectively. Soon Dunant was able to make plans for his return to Geneva.

The Birth of the Red Cross

When Dunant returned from his trip to Italy he was a changed man. He could not forget the horrors he had seen at Castiglione. The scenes of the battlefield haunted him day and night. Even his work did not seem important to him any more and he began to lose interest in it.

He forgot all about the windmills he had wanted to export to Algeria and for which he had gone to get Napoleon III's permission. He forgot about the confidence his father's friends had shown in him by investing their money in his business. He spent his time lost in thought. How could he forget the suffering and misery he had witnessed?

He was sure that the situation in Castiglione would have been far less tragic if he had a hundred experienced and qualified volunteer orderlies and nurses to help him. They could have formed the core of a larger group organised to tend the wounded. As it was, much zeal had been

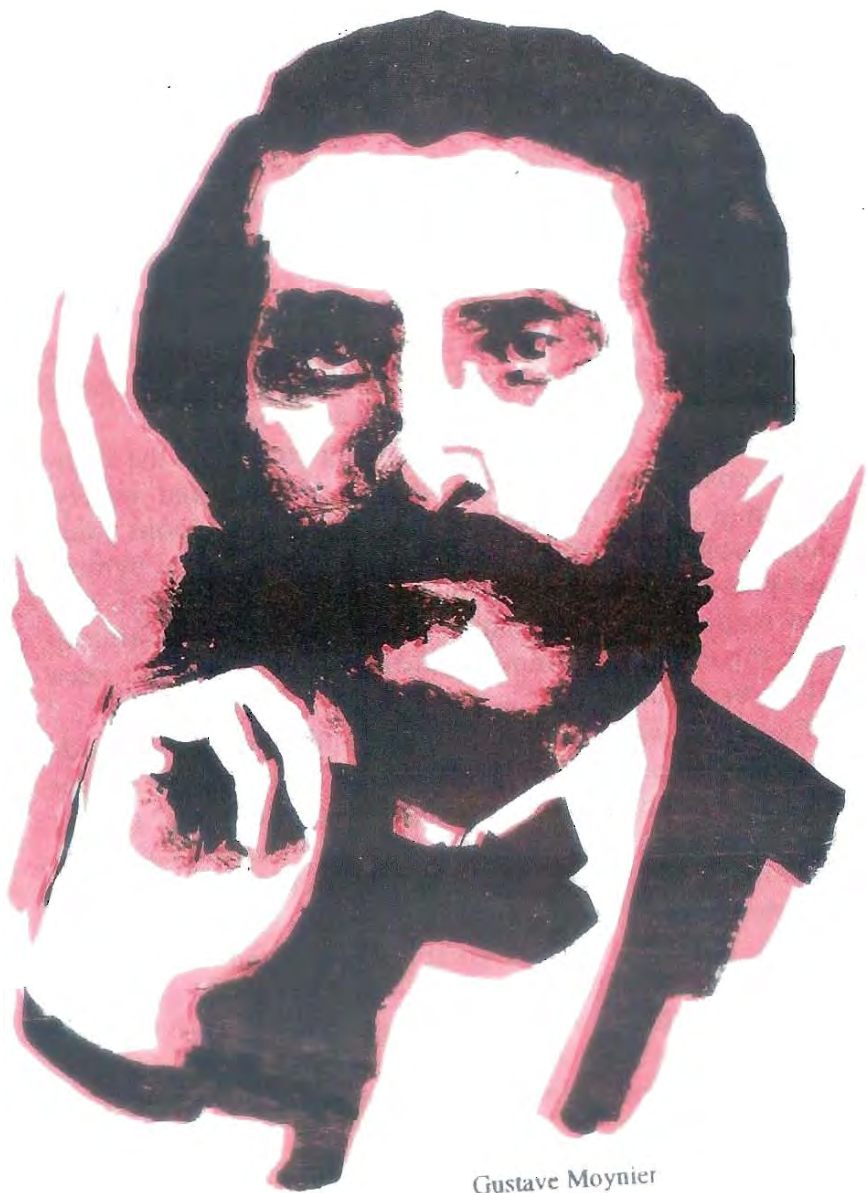
wasted. Many well-meaning townspeople with gifts of unsuitable food for the wounded had to be turned away. If only they had been instructed in advance their goodwill and enthusiasm could have been turned to better use. Many lives could have been saved. Had doctors not been captured and field hospitals been protected, treatment could have been more easily available.

As he thought about this day after day a plan began to form in Dunant's mind. He decided to put this plan down on paper and publish it in the form of a book to bring it to the notice of thinking men in Europe. Other pioneers had written books to spread their ideas and achieved results. He would do the same.

His book, *A Souvenir of Solferino*, described the Battle of Solferino and the suffering that followed. It also contained proposals to remedy the tragic situation he had witnessed. Dunant suggested the formation in all countries of voluntary relief societies which could be mobilised whenever there was a war to help the victims, irrespective of their colour, class or creed. It pleaded for an international agreement to protect the wounded.

A Souvenir of Solferino was written in French. It took twelve months to complete and was published in 1862. It was a passionate appeal against the inhumanity of war. Even today it is one of the most vivid and moving accounts of war ever written.

As soon as his book was out of the press Dunant began a tireless campaign throughout the continent. He distributed hundreds of copies of it in every city of Europe,



Gustave Moynier

giving no thought to the money he was spending. He neglected his business. He was a man driven by a purpose

A Souvenir of Solferino was a moving and powerful document. All those who read it became not only aware of the horror of war but also the pitiful inadequacy of a few helpers to help the wounded. Dunant's suggestions met with an overwhelmingly favourable response.

A new attitude to mankind was sweeping over Europe in the 1860's. There was concern for the suffering of others and a consciousness of the havoc war wrought.

Even heads of state were beginning to realise the enormous cost of war in terms of men, money and misery. They had seen the immense damage modern weapons could cause. Solferino with 50,000 dead in fifteen hours of fighting had proved this beyond dispute. People were tired of war. The Napoleonic Wars had lasted ten years, the Crimean War three. In every family, husbands and sons had been killed or wounded.

Everyone was, therefore, favourably inclined towards Dunant's proposals. Gustave Moynier, a well-known lawyer and philanthropist, was among those who were greatly impressed by Dunant's book. Mainly because of him, Dunant's dream began to take concrete shape. Moynier was not only President of the Geneva Public Welfare Society, but he also had great influence and tremendous organisational skill.

When the Geneva Public Welfare Society met in 1863 Dunant's ideas were discussed at length. A committee was immediately formed to begin organising relief societies of



Gustave Moynier



Dr. Louis Appia



Dr. Theodore Maunoir

the kind he had proposed. The Chairman of the Committee was the highly respected commander of the Swiss army, General Guillaume Dufour. Two of the members, Louis Appia and Theodore Maunoir, were doctors; the fourth was Moynier and the fifth Dunant, who acted as Secretary.

The Committee invited all the European governments to send their representatives to a conference to discuss Dunant's proposals. This was an extremely bold step for five men of a small country to take. Yet fourteen states sent thirty-six delegates to the conference which was held on October 26, 1863.

For eight months before this, Dunant visited all the European capitals, seeking support for the conference and inviting people to attend it. An international agreement such as he was suggesting had never before been proposed. Meanwhile the other members of the Committee worked on drafting resolutions and recommendations.

A second conference followed on August 8, 1864. It was called by the Swiss Federal Government. Fifteen European states sent their delegates to the conference. After two days of discussion, the First Geneva Convention was drafted. It put forward ten important points, the most noteworthy of which were: the governments which signed the Convention were hereafter bound to look after the sick and wounded army personnel in times of war; those looking after the injured would be given protection; hospitals, hospital equipment, and ambulances would not be attacked and prisoners would be exchanged whenever possible. It was also decided to adopt a red cross on a white

background as a symbol of neutrality. This symbol could be easily recognised and would help doctors and nurses reach the wounded on the battlefield. The first man to wear the Red Cross band was Louis Appia, one of the two doctors in the Committee of Five.

At the conference all the countries were asked to form volunteer units which would help the sick and wounded during a war. These units were the forbearers of the Red Cross Societies of today.







August 22, 1864, when the representatives of fifteen states signed this Convention, was an important landmark for the world. For, from this day, those in battle were no longer left to die unattended or prisoners of war killed.



Charity in the Midst of Battle

After the 1864 agreement, many countries formed local Red Cross Societies. These societies had much work to do, for wars did not end in Europe as a result of the Geneva Convention. States continued to quarrel and there were several armed conflicts. The first important contribution of the Red Cross was during the Franco-Prussian war of 1870-71. Red Cross workers looked after 5,000,000 sick and wounded and the white flag with a red cross fluttering in the breeze came to represent to everyone, irrespective of nationality or race, a saving power.

In the first few years of its existence, however, the society was known as the Society for the Relief of Wounded Combatants. And it was only in 1867, when the Netherlands officially adopted the name, that it was called the Red Cross Society. It took as its motto the phrase *Inter Arma Caritas* which is Latin for Charity in the Midst of Battle.

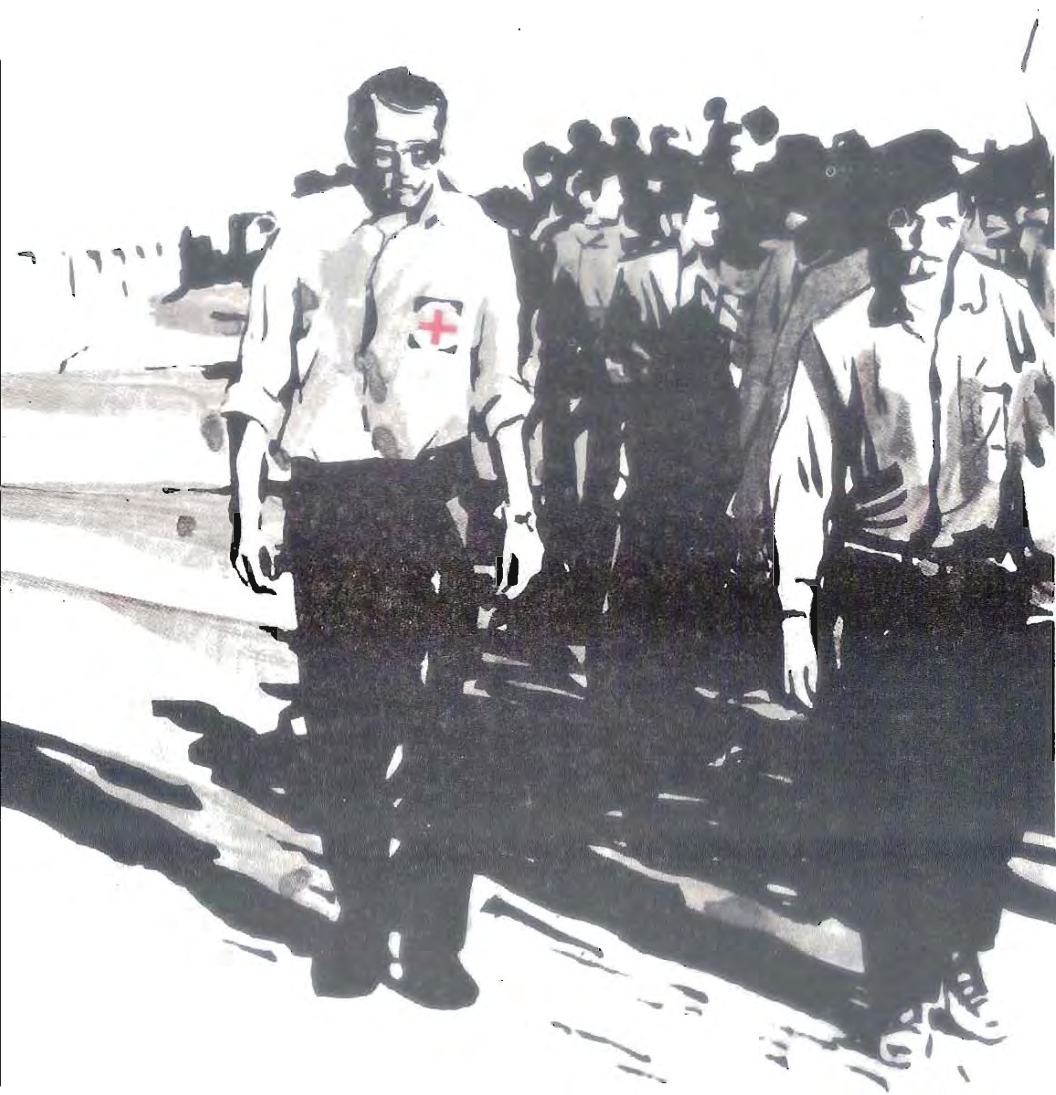
The fame of the Red Cross spread far and wide. Even Gandhiji served as an enthusiastic volunteer during the Boer War (1899–1902). There is a pencil drawing of him in which he is seen wearing a stretcher-bearer's uniform, a Red Cross arm-band and an army hat. He was thirty-seven years old at the time and an accepted leader of the Indian community in South Africa. In 1907 the Second Geneva Convention extended aid and protection to victims of war at sea. And with every fresh involvement in war, the role of the Red Cross grew.

Wars created a host of problems in their wake. Not only the wounded suffered. There was the care of the prisoners of war to think of.

Before the Red Cross came into being, war captives were generally ill-treated and sometimes even killed. Their families had no way of communicating with them. Wives pined for news of their soldier-husbands and mothers for their sons. There was no one to tell them what had become of their dear ones. The Red Cross undertook this responsibility. Being neutral, it was acceptable to both sides in a war. During World War I it set up an Information Agency and has continued to give information about prisoners of war ever since.

Answering questions from anxious relations was difficult and tedious work. Letter after letter had to be written to trace the whereabouts and condition of one man. If a man was reported missing, volunteers at the Information Agency often wrote letters to ten or fifteen men in the missing man's regiment in the hope of getting information.







Sometimes they were unsuccessful but often their letters received a positive response and a soldier given up as lost was traced and news of him conveyed to his family.

One of the men who did this work was Romain Rolland, the brilliant French writer who was Gandhiji's close friend. He went daily to the offices of the Red Cross during World War I and offered his services for clerical work.

The world had never witnessed a war as terrible as World War I. Unlike previous wars it was not confined to two or three countries but affected many continents. Millions of forces were involved and millions of Red Cross volunteers worked tirelessly in the face of great danger to help the wounded and dying.

During the War, in appreciation of the work done by these volunteers, the Nobel Prize was awarded to the International Committee of the Red Cross in 1917. The Nobel Peace Prize was instituted by Alfred Nobel, the 'Dynamite King' of the nineteenth century. Nobel was a millionaire who had amassed an enormous fortune by manufacturing armaments. Towards the end of his life, however, he was overcome by guilt about the manner in which he had made his millions and, in repentance, he donated his money and instituted a prize to honour those who had worked towards promoting peace.

World War II exceeded World War I in magnitude. The Red Cross collected and issued 450,000 tons of relief supplies and spent more than \$13,000,000 on the Prisoner Information Service alone. Its delegates inspected prisoner of war camps and tried to improve the treatment and

condition of prisoners.

The International Committee of the Red Cross opened the Central Prisoner of War Agency in 1939. The Committee staff maintained a card index for the location of millions of prisoners and internees. It forwarded relief supplies and helped in the exchange of prisoners of war.

Red Cross workers also operated canteens for travelling soldiers at station platforms and set up recreation centres for the war weary. Whenever the army could not cope with a situation Red Cross volunteers moved in and carried on the work of relief and rehabilitation, for many years, all over the world, even after the War had ended.

The Red Cross may never be able to bring an end to wars but so long as there are wars, it reminds people that the enemy is a human being and as such must be honoured and respected. Because of the Red Cross there will always be charity in the midst of battle.

Clara Barton; Pioneer of Disaster Relief

In 1884 Clara Barton, the founder of the American Red Cross, sat in a chair in the sitting-room of her home in a small American town named Dansville. A crop of rich brown hair streaked with grey framed her strong features and rugged face. Sixty years of hectic activity lay behind her.

Clara Barton was very troubled. Across all the newspapers was splashed the news of a devastating forest fire. The fire which had started in the drought stricken forests and farms of Michigan had been raging for days, laying waste everything around. High winds had whipped the flames till over 1,800 square miles of American territory were scorched. Thousands of people fled from their homes. Tree after tree was burnt to cinders. So fierce was the heat of the fire that birds grew dizzy and fell to the ground, fish died in streams, and orchards, miles away, burst into premature bloom.



Clara Barton

In spite of her age, Clara Barton was determined to do something to help the people in distress. During the American Civil War she had faced far more difficult situations and had the confidence born of experience. She raised a Red Cross flag over her house in Dansville and signalled disaster-relief. She also wrote a graphic account in the newspapers of the devastation the fire had wrought: "There is no food left in the fire's track for a rabbit to eat and indeed no rabbit to eat it, if there were."

This moving description touched off a national flood of gifts and offers of help for the fire victims. Food, clothes and medicines began pouring in. The dazed survivors of the fire were fed and given shelter. Wood and tools were sent to repair damaged homes and build new ones.

The fire was barely forgotten when severe floods began. The Ohio river, flooded with melting snows, overflowed its banks. When Clara Barton arrived in Cincinnati she found the city afloat. Inhabitants were marooned on rooftops. And rain kept pouring down. To make matters worse, there was a cyclone. Houses and trees were uprooted, millions of acres of cotton and sugarland laid waste. Houses floated down the river like ghostly ships. Man and beast were swept away by the roaring torrent.

Clara Barton immediately chartered a ship—the *Josh V. Throop*. With a few men and women helpers and large quantities of coal and clothes she set forth on her mission of mercy. The *Josh V. Throop* was the first Red Cross relief ship to sail on American waters.

Moving down the river from village to village, it un-

loaded fuel and supplies wherever there was a group of people. At each stop Clara invited some people aboard, made an estimate of their needs, appointed a committee to take and distribute supplies and doled out the amounts she thought would be sufficient. Then she sailed away quickly, leaving the bewildered folk gazing after her, wondering who she was and what the strange Red Cross flag stood for.

Clara Barton, the founder of the Red Cross in America, was a teacher in a New England school and became a volunteer worker on the front during the American Civil War. She became so well-known that she was nicknamed the 'Angel of Mercy'. Then she went to Europe and did a great deal of relief work there. It was here that she first learnt of the Red Cross. She returned to America determined to win government approval for the Geneva Convention and obtain support for the Red Cross movement. As a result of her efforts the American Government accepted the conditions of the Geneva Convention in 1882. She was the first President of the American Red Cross.

Henri Dunant had suggested the need for relief work of the kind Clara was doing. But until the Red Cross flag on her house signalled disaster-relief, the Red Cross had only helped victims of war. She was the first to realise that the victims of natural calamities and of famine and plague were sometimes far greater in number than victims of war and were also in great need of help. She inspired Red Cross groups in America and elsewhere to peace-time rescue missions of various kinds.





Due to Clara Barton's example Red Cross workers are ever on the alert for news of natural disasters, epidemics and even house collapses. Armed with provisions and medicines they are always in the forefront to lend a helping hand.

In times of severe natural calamities, Red Cross Societies in different parts of the world call on each other for assistance. For, the Red Cross is like a large family made up

of the National Red Cross Societies of 114 different countries. In 1974 it had over 230,000,000 members who willingly helped each other whenever a local society could not cope with a situation. They set up field hospitals and camps, erected colonies for displaced people and inoculated millions of refugees. They gave supplies costing over Rs. 300,000,000 to Bangladesh in 1971.

Henri Dunant had said, "I want an organisation which will be confined neither to England nor to any other country, but which will automatically go into action in every conflict anywhere." His wish has been fulfilled.

The Indian Red Cross

The Red Cross spirit has existed in India since time immemorial. The Buddha preached compassion, and so did many saints before and after him. One of them was Guru Gobind Singh, the tenth and last Guru of the Sikhs.

It is said that in a battle in which the Guru had ordered his followers to fight and fight to the last, many men fell. A simple water-carrier, Bhai Kanhaiya, moved about the battlefield with his leather bucket, offering water to the injured of both sides.

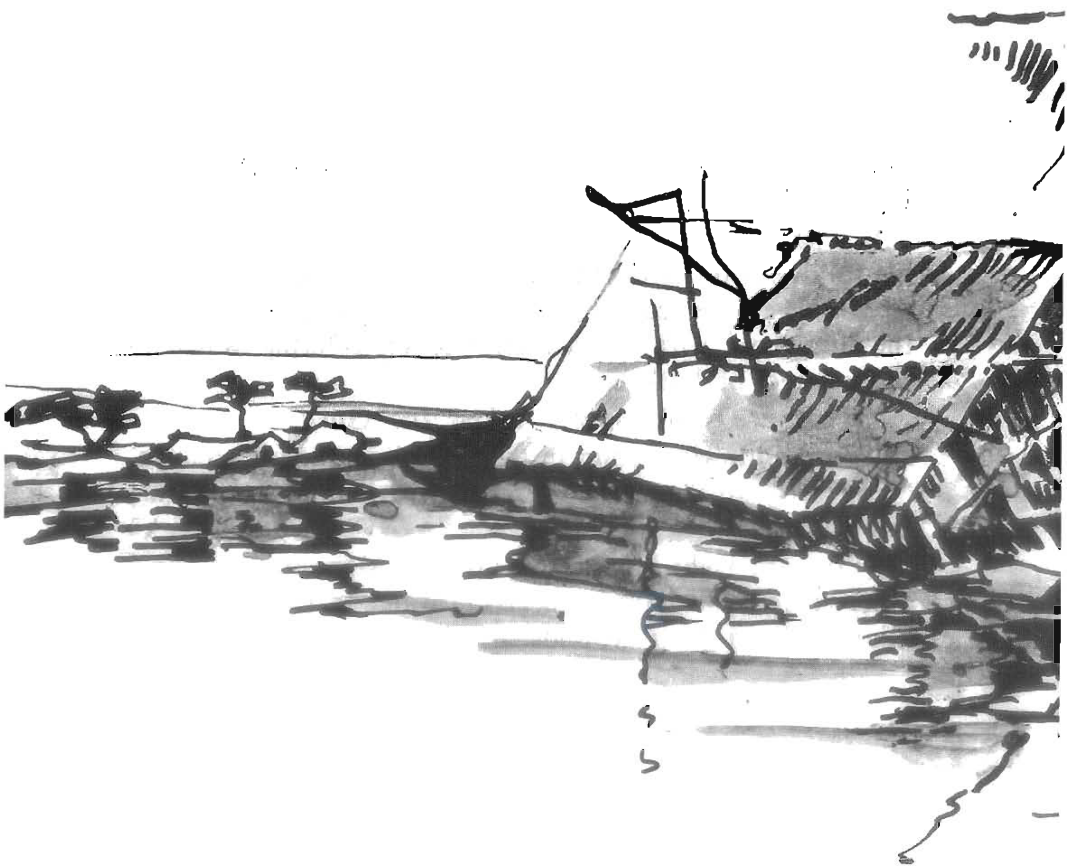
"What are you doing?" asked the Guru.

"I am following your instructions," replied Kanhaiya. "You said we were fighting against evil and not against any individual."

"You are right," said the Guru. "Men are the same everywhere. You have been giving water to those who are injured. Tend their wounds also."

This was in the seventeenth century. Guru Govind Singh is no more; neither is Bhai Kanhaiya. But a lamp had been lit, an example set. Temples and charities began to give their wealth to set up hospitals for the needy, whatever their caste or creed. Rich men put up shacks with drinking water for weary travellers and built homes for poor children.

In India the Red Cross began its work in 1920 when the Red Cross Society was founded by an Act of the Indian



Legislative Council. The 1914-18 War had just ended and there was a great need for volunteers to help the large number of wounded and convalescing soldiers.

The Indian Red Cross was called into action for the first time seven years after its formation. There were floods in the Punjab in 1927 and the Red Cross sent money to the flood victims.



From this small beginning, over half a century ago, the Indian Red Cross has taken deep root and spread, banyan fashion, over the whole country. And today it is a huge relief society with over 500 branches and sub-branches in India.

The headquarters of the Society are on Red Cross Road, New Delhi, where a Red Cross flag flutters from a tall flag-pole in the compound. There are state branches in all the capital cities and white flags with bold red crosses fly on the buildings of all the branches.

There are various departments inside the buildings. In one, bus conductors are given first aid training, in another those who have lost a limb in an accident register their applications for artificial limbs and in another, the poor are given clothes and vitamin tablets.

The Red Cross buildings are always alive with activity, the telephone lines always busy. On a typical day the bell rings, an urgent voice says that a patient has been taken seriously ill and must be removed to hospital immediately. An ambulance is required. The Ambulance Officer notes the address and assures the caller that the ambulance will leave at once. In a matter of minutes the vehicle is on its way to the given address. Once there, the rear doors are opened and a stretcher taken out. The patient is put gently on the stretcher which is then lifted on to the ambulance. The driver turns on the ignition, switches on the red roof-light and other cars make way as the ambulance courses down the thoroughfares of the city to the hospital.

By the time the ambulance returns after a morning trip,

another vehicle, a mobile blood collection van, is often leaving the Red Cross building. A doctor, a technician and a social worker are in it. They are on their way to a college where a number of girls and boys have volunteered to give their blood for patients who need it. A lot of blood is needed for transfusions in hospitals and a donation of blood can save the life of someone who is critically ill.

Now, two men hobble into the building on crutches. One is a young milkman, the other a mechanic. They lost their foothold on a moving train and their legs were cut off. They were advised the use of artificial limbs by the doctor so that they could become mobile again. But artificial limbs are very expensive. How can a milkman and a mechanic afford to pay for them? They are told that the Red Cross helps pay for artificial limbs. So they have come here to ask for assistance. Several months later, with brand new limbs to support them, they return to the building to be photographed. They smile as the photograph is taken because they can look after themselves once again and have found work to do.

During the days of the 1971 armed conflict with Pakistan, the Red Cross buildings buzzed with even more than the usual activity. Ambulances took accident cases to hospital, amputees hobbled in and out, blood collection teams set out to collect blood and, in addition, hundreds of people poured in for first aid and home nursing instruction.

During that time hundreds of women and children worked in these buildings, packing bags with sweets and other gifts for the prisoners of war. These gifts had been





donated by men, women and children who wanted to give a little luxury to a fighting soldier. Boys and girls tirelessly fetched and carried parcels from the stores to the packing rooms, from the packing rooms to the trucks.

And on February 22, 1972, some of these packages were taken by the Indian Red Cross team to the Wagah border. A Pakistani Red Cross team similarly brought gift packages to the border. At Wagah, in the presence of the Swiss delegates of the International Committee of the Red Cross, the parcels were exchanged. The Indian Red Cross team handed over parcels and mail for Indian prisoners of war in Pakistan and the Pakistani Red Cross team handed over parcels and mail for Pakistani prisoners of war in India.

By far the greatest challenge faced by the Indian Red Cross was the influx of nearly 10,000,000 refugees from East Bengal into India in 1971-72. A thousand milk

distribution centres for undernourished children and mothers were opened. Fifty-seven medical units gave aid to the refugees. Biscuits, medicines, baby food and blankets were distributed in huge quantities. Red Cross Societies all over the world generously answered the call for assistance.

The refugees have returned to their homes in Bangladesh but natural and man-made disasters never seem to cease. There are always new challenges to be met, the war against misery is an endless war and so the Red Cross is forever in demand.

Junior Red Cross

Just as Henri Dunant had been interested in the work his mother was doing for the orphanage in Geneva, children all over the world wanted to follow the example of their parents and work for the Red Cross.

Drawing upon this desire, Clara Barton built up a following of young men and women who could assist in her work. For she had once been told that she would need "feet for running, to go, to come, to collect, to buy, to make multitudes of visits", and as time went by, she found how true this was. She could lead and direct, but young people with strength and enthusiasm were required to do the work.

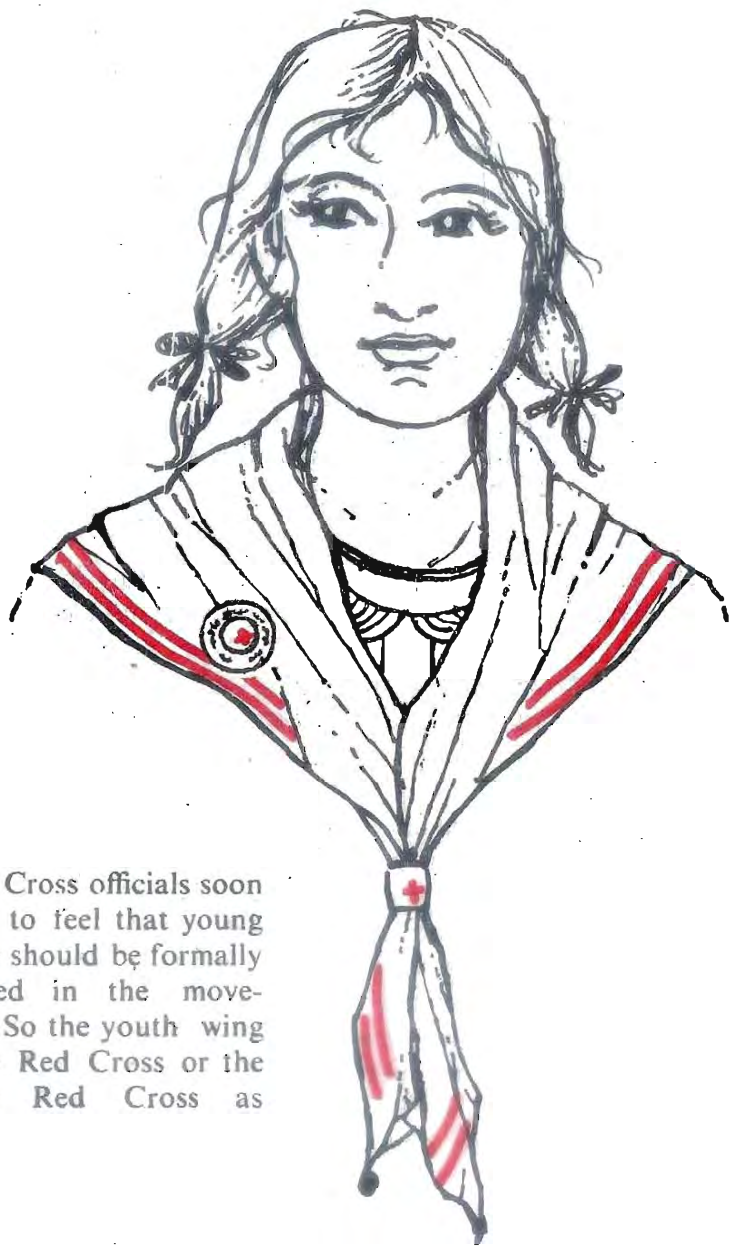
In March 1884, during the Ohio floods, six boys and girls in Waterford, Pennsylvania, raised \$51.25 by staging a public entertainment for the victims of the flood. They wrote a letter to Clara Barton enclosing the money and

describing the performance and asked her to "use the money where it would do the most good". The letter was signed: The Little Six—Joe Farrar, twelve years old; Florence Howe, eleven years old; Mary Barton, eleven years old; Reed White, eleven years old; Bertie Ainsworth, ten years old; Lloyd Barton, seven years old. Clara Barton was very moved. She decided to use this precious gift to the best possible advantage.

A month later the *Josh V. Throop* spotted a tall, thin woman with a little girl at a desolate spot, on the bank of the river, known as Cave-in-Rock. This was Mrs Plew whose husband, a river pilot, had died during an earlier flood, leaving her with six children, the youngest of whom was three and the eldest only fifteen. They had somehow managed to survive with two horses, three cows, a few chickens and some hogs. But the flood had taken the cows and horses and most of the hogs. Then there was a storm and their house was destroyed. The Plews moved into an old log hut with their surviving chickens. The family was determined to hold on.

Six children, thought Miss Barton...and remembered 'The Little Six'. She told Mrs Plew about the gift from the Waterford children and offered to bring the sum of fifty-one dollars up to a hundred with Red Cross money.

With the money Mrs Plew and the children built a new house. They named it 'The Little Six' and for years thereafter, people sailing past on the river could see, high on the bank where the Plews lived, a board with a painted sign which read, 'Little Six—Red Cross Landing'.



Red Cross officials soon began to feel that young people should be formally included in the movement. So the youth wing of the Red Cross or the Junior Red Cross as

it is called, was formed in 1922, just two years after our own Red Cross Society was established. Its aim was to promote health, life and international friendship. It would also attempt to make young people understand and accept their responsibilities to fellow human beings and their community.

And today, thousands of Juniors all over India take the Junior Red Cross pledge:

I pledge myself to care for my own health and that of others, to help the sick and suffering, especially children, and to look upon other children all over the world as my friends.

In the spirit of this pledge the Delhi Juniors level roads in outlying villages during their summer holiday camps, organise cleanliness drives, dig rubble pits and sweep village roads. It is in the same spirit that the Punjab Juniors collect funds to help poor students and assist the Hospital for Disabled Children at Saket, near Chandigarh.

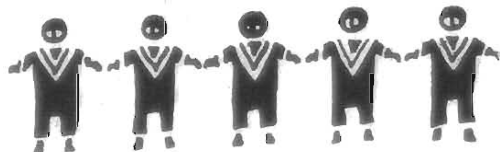
An impressive example of work done by youngsters is that of the Australian Red Cross youth. As a result of the long and terrible war in Vietnam thousands of children were left homeless and orphaned. Australian Juniors enthusiastically collect money which helps maintain the Can-Tho Orphanage, a home for children between two and fourteen years of age.

In this way, all over the world, young Red Cross workers look after children—children who are often as young as themselves but in less fortunate circumstances. Red Cross Juniors realise how unimportant national differences





are—the essential oneness of man is stressed by them. They arrange talks, films and slides about different countries and exchange photograph albums with Red Cross Juniors elsewhere. Sometimes our Juniors go abroad and Juniors from other countries visit India to attend International Study Circles. They make lasting friendships, the world is drawn closer together, and Dunant's ideals live on.



Death of Dunant

One day a young journalist holidaying in the little Swiss village of Heiden noticed a handsome, silver haired old man. Curious, he began asking questions about him. He discovered that the man was none other than Jean Henri Dunant, the founder of the Red Cross. The journalist excitedly reported his find in the press, and people all over the world learnt that the man they had thought long dead was alive but living in poverty.

For thirty years Dunant had lived in complete obscurity. After the Red Cross had been established Dunant, who had spent all his time and money on it, became penniless. His neglected business declined and by 1867 he was totally bankrupt. Rather than let this damage the cause he loved, Dunant resigned from the Committee. The Committee had able and hard working men who went on without him. They made his dream a reality. And the world forgot Dunant.



Henri Dunant

After the press report Dunant was flooded with mail and offers of money and help. He refused to accept anything. He had become used to his simple life. Fame meant little to him.

But he could not escape fame. The first Nobel Peace Prize awarded in 1901 was given jointly to him and Frederic Passy, the founder of a French peace organisation. Dunant gave the prize money to the cause he loved most. He continued to live as he had done before and never left the peaceful seclusion of Heiden till his death.

Dunant died in 1910, twelve years before the Junior Red Cross was formed. He did not live to see this most enduring monument to his memory. But he did live to see the movement he had inspired spread and encircle the world.

Today Dunant's ideals unite millions of people all over the world. The Red Cross is a brotherhood unique in the history of man.

On May 8 every year, the world remembers Dunant. World Red Cross Day is celebrated to commemorate the birthday of the founder. Members in different parts of the world meet and resolve to carry on his work. Red Cross flags fly in the breeze proclaiming that 'All Men Are Brothers'



ISBN 81-237-0875-0

NATIONAL BOOK TRUST INDIA